

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA
WAYCROSS DIVISION

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U.S. DISTRICT COURT
WAYCROSS DIVISION
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MARTY DUANE GRIFFIN,

Plaintiff,

v.

CIVIL ACTION NO.: CV507-011

SHERIFF, COFFEE COUNTY; JOHN
DOE, Sheriff Deputy No. One, and
JOHN DOE, Sheriff Deputy No. Two,

Defendants.

MAGISTRATE JUDGE'S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Plaintiff, who is currently confined at Coastal State Prison in Garden City, Georgia, filed an action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. A prisoner proceeding in a civil action against officers or employees of government entities must comply with the mandates of the Prison Litigation Reform Act, 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915 & 1915A. In determining compliance, the court shall be guided by the longstanding principle that *pro se* pleadings are entitled to liberal construction. Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520, 92 S. Ct. 594, 596, 30 L. Ed. 2d 652, 654 (1972); Walker v. Dugger, 860 F.2d 1010, 1011 (11th Cir. 1988).

28 U.S.C. § 1915A requires a district court to screen the complaint for cognizable claims before or as soon as possible after docketing. The court must dismiss the complaint or any portion of the complaint that is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a

claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary damages from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)(1) and (2).

In Mitchell v. Farcass, 112 F.3d 1483, 1490 (11th Cir. 1997), the Eleventh Circuit interpreted the language contained in § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii), which is nearly identical to that contained in the screening provisions at § 1915A(b). As the language of § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) closely tracks the language of Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), the court held that the same standards for determining whether to dismiss for failure to state a claim under Rule 12(b)(6) should be applied to prisoner complaints filed pursuant to § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii). Mitchell, 112 F.3d at 1490. The Court may dismiss a complaint for failure to state a claim only where it appears beyond a doubt that a *pro se* litigant can prove no set of facts that would entitle him to relief. Hughes v. Rowe, 449 U.S. 5, 10, 101 S. Ct. 173, 176, 66 L. Ed. 2d 163 (1980); Mitchell, 112 F.3d at 1490. While the court in Mitchell interpreted § 1915(e), its interpretation guides this Court in applying the identical language of § 1915A.

Plaintiff alleges he and two other people who were in a car with him were arrested after being stopped at a road block set up in Coffee County. According to Plaintiff, a deputy asked the driver of the car to produce his license, registration, and proof of insurance; the deputy noticed what appeared to be a marijuana cigarette in the car. Plaintiff contends he and the other two people were asked to get out of the car, where deputies contend they found cocaine residue, an ecstasy pill, and an open container. Plaintiff asserts he and the other two people were arrested for possession of these substances. Plaintiff alleges his Fourth Amendment right to be free from an unreasonable search and seizure was violated.

In general, the distinction between claims which may be brought under § 1983 and those which must be brought as habeas petitions is now reasonably well settled. Claims in which prisoners assert that they are being subjected to unconstitutional punishment not imposed as part of their sentence, such as, for example, being exposed to an excessive amount of force, are § 1983 actions, not habeas actions. See, e.g., Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 114 S. Ct. 1970, 128 L. Ed. 2d 811 (1994). Habeas actions, in contrast, are those that explicitly or by necessary implication challenge a prisoner's conviction or the sentence imposed on him by (or under the administrative system implementing the judgment of) a court. Thus, for example, when a prisoner makes a claim that, if successful, could shorten his term of imprisonment, the claim must be brought as a habeas petition, not as a § 1983 claim. See, e.g., Edwards v. Balisok, 520 U.S. 641, 117 S. Ct. 1584, 137 L. Ed. 2d 906 (1997); Heck v. Humphrey, 512 U.S. 477, 114 S. Ct. 2364, 129 L. Ed. 2d 383 (1994). In other words,

to recover damages for allegedly unconstitutional conviction or imprisonment, or for other harm caused by actions whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid, a § 1983 plaintiff must prove that the conviction or sentence has been reversed on direct appeal, expunged by executive order, declared invalid by a state tribunal authorized to make such determination, or called into question by a federal court's issuance of a writ of habeas corpus, 28 U.S.C. § 2254. A claim for damages bearing that relationship to a conviction or sentence that has *not* been so invalidated is not cognizable under § 1983. Thus, when a state prisoner seeks damages in a § 1983 suit, the district court must consider whether a judgment in favor of the plaintiff would necessarily imply the invalidity of his conviction or sentence; if it would, the complaint must be dismissed unless the plaintiff can demonstrate that the conviction or sentence has already been invalidated. But if the district court determines that the plaintiff's action, even if successful, will *not* demonstrate the invalidity of any outstanding criminal judgment against the plaintiff, the action should be allowed to proceed, in the absence of some other bar to the suit.

Heck, 512 U.S. at 486-87, 114 S. Ct. at 2372-73 (emphasis in original). Based on this settled distinction, the claims at issue and the relief sought here are far more analogous to those in habeas petitions rather than § 1983 actions.

Additionally, when a state prisoner challenges the "fact or duration of his physical imprisonment, and the relief he seeks is a determination that he is entitled to immediate release or a speedier release from that imprisonment, his sole federal remedy is a writ of habeas corpus." Harden v. Pataki, 320 F.3d 1289, 1294 n.6 (11th Cir. 2003)(quoting Preiser v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 475, 500, 93 S. Ct. 1827, 1841, 36 L. Ed. 2d 439 (1973)). However, Plaintiff must exhaust his available state remedies before a federal court can address these claims. Plaintiff asserts he has been deprived of his right to life and liberty since his arrest. This assertion contests the fact of his imprisonment, and thus, is not cognizable under § 1983.

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, it is my **RECOMMENDATION** that Plaintiff's Complaint be **DISMISSED** for his failure to state a cognizable claim pursuant to section 1983.

SO REPORTED and RECOMMENDED, this 15th day of May, 2007.


JAMES E. GRAHAM
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE